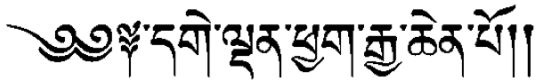

Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



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5 May 2009

As usual we can spend five minutes in meditation. The motivation for the meditation can be along the lines of the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. (Pause for meditation)

The particular modes of maintaining mindfulness (cont.)

3. Maintaining mindfulness with appropriate measure

We have now come to the third method of maintaining mindfulness. The corresponding verses from the root text are:

19 ... Finally when you have eliminated all external mental activity and your mind is in a clear state you should continue the meditation in a relaxed and natural manner, concentrating on the mind as a clear cogniser, without letting your memory slacken.

20 It has been taught, 'Tighten [your attention and memory] firmly and meditate in a relaxed manner. This is the way you should settle your mind'. Elsewhere it has been said that if your mind, which had previously been constricted too forcefully with the pincers of memory and alertness, were to be relaxed slightly, then there is no doubt that you will become free of mental agitation. As it has been explained then, you should relax your mind without any mental wandering.

In relation to these verses the auto-commentary reads:

Once the disturbing conceptual thoughts have been severed and one is able to maintain a focused attention without distractions, one must not lapse from mindfulness and introspection. One must tighten one's attention and loosen it when necessary, and ease into meditative equipoise.

Thus, as the auto-commentary explains, once the disturbing conceptual thoughts have been severed, meaning that they have subsided, and one is able to maintain one's focus, then one must be sure not to lapse from mindfulness and introspection, but maintain it and then ease into meditative equipoise.

The auto-commentary explains the sources of the quotes in the root text:

Just as Machig Labdron has said:

Tighten [your attention and memory] firmly and meditate in a relaxed manner.

This is the way you should settle your mind.

Likewise just as the great Brahmin Saraha has said:

If your mind, which had previously been constricted too forcefully with the pincers of memory and alertness, were to be relaxed slightly, then there is no doubt that you would become free of mental agitation.

Just as mentioned above one must tighten the depth of one's attention and loosen it appropriately.

This is actually a very significant instruction. It is quite hard to determine when mindfulness is being maintained with appropriate measure, but once it has been identified it needs to be maintained throughout the meditation session. Rather than being too intense in the beginning and then relaxing later, or being too relaxed in the beginning and then trying to tighten it later, one must attain an appropriate measure from the very start, and maintain that measure throughout.

The auto-commentary further reads:

When one notices that one's attention has become too tight, which causes desirous excitement to arise, one needs to slightly loosen it. When one notices that one's attention has become too loose, which causes laxity or mental dullness to arise, one needs to slightly tighten one's attention.

As explained here, one must really pay attention developing the right measure of focus so that there is no need to be constantly adjusting it. If the focus is too tight then that causes excitement, and if it is too loose then that causes laxity. So in order to be free from these obstacles one must maintain mindfulness with the appropriate measure. When through familiarity and experience one detects the right measure, then that should be applied from the very start of one's session and be maintained all the way through. That is the right way to focus on the object then the focus on the object will not be too tight or too loose.

Another specific instruction on how to focus on the object is that the focus on should be as if the object and the mind focusing on the object are one. Of course the mind and the object are not one and the same, but the focus on the object should reach the point where it is as if the object and the mind focusing on the object are inseparable. This is the appropriate way of applying mindfulness while focusing on the object.

As the auto-commentary further reads:

Within a balanced measure of attention, one withdraws one's mind from disturbing conceptual thoughts. Whenever one achieves some level of stability one must be cautious of laxity occurring. Just as Acharya Chandra Gomin has said:

If one applies effort, excitement will occur,

However when that is abandoned, faint heartedness occurs,

If it is so hard to find the correct measure between the two,

What shall I do, with my agitated and disturbed mind?

What Chandra Gomin is indicating here is that it is really quite difficult to find the right measure of mindfulness. If one applies too much effort then that causes excitement, and if one relaxes too much and does not apply a sufficient amount of effort, then faint-heartedness or laxity occurs. So it is really hard to find the correct measure between the two.

What Chandra Gomin is implying is that one must definitely find that right measure. He is explaining the fact that every time one needs to apply some effort it actually causes some disturbance to the focus on the object; and when the focus is too tight and one has think about relaxing it, then that too causes some disturbance

to the focus. Even though one's mind may not waver away from its focus on object, there is still a subtle disturbance to single-pointed concentration on the object. As explained earlier although from the fourth stage of concentration onwards one is able to maintain one's focus on the object, one must still be cautious about the faults of excitement and laxity occurring.

When the appropriate measure of focus on the object has been applied, then without lapsing from the mindfulness that has already been applied, one slightly relaxes the intensity of focus on the object

As explained in Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, initially some effort is needed to focus on the object, but on attaining the appropriate measure one relaxes the effort a bit in accordance with the technique.

Kyiwo Tsang specifically refers to the phrase, 'without letting your memory slacken' in the root text. Reaching the appropriate measure of mindfulness, involves reducing the effort that is involved in focusing on the object, while at the same time maintaining the same level of mindfulness. However, reducing the effort does not imply relaxing the sharpness and clarity of the focus on the object. As explained earlier, the two main attributes of concentration are that it has an intense sharpness and clear focus on the object. Thus, as one maintains mindfulness, the intense sharpness and the clarity of the object should increase.

With respect to 'Tighten [your attention and memory] firmly and meditate in a relaxed manner', Kyiwo Tsang explains that if one applies too much effort while in the process of maintaining focus on the object, then there is a danger of excitement arising, and that if one relaxes too much, there is the danger of laxity arising. So the right measure of mindfulness is where one is not applying too much force (because that would cause excitement), and not allowing the mind to be too relaxed (because that causes laxity).

The commentary further explains that when the root text says 'it had previously been constricted too forcefully with the pincers of memory and alertness', then 'constricted too forcefully' indicates that if there is too much force then excitement will arise. Thus one needs to apply the appropriate measure of relaxing to the right degree.

In summary, Kyiwo Tsang's commentary explains that being able to relax one's focus to the appropriate measure, while maintaining the focus on the object (without mindfulness lapsing) is 'maintaining mindfulness with the appropriate measure'. Then Kyiwo Tsang quotes from the lam rim: 'When the meditator has reached a point in the meditation session where, in accordance to one's capacity, one reaches the appropriate measure of maintaining one's focus without the dangers of excitement and laxity, and is confident that excitement and laxity are under control, then while maintaining a continuous vigilance checking out for these two faults, one relaxes into the meditation'.

The explanation in the lam rim text is really a very profound instruction. What is being explained is that when the meditator is able to feel confident, say to meditate for 20 minutes without the faults of excitement

and laxity obstructing their focus, then that is how long their meditation session should be. Until one can comfortably increase the time span of one's meditation, it is best to stick to that limit. So, this is a really profound instruction.

The great master and scholar Chandra Gomin explains that the statement, 'a relaxed mind is a good meditation', does not apply to beginners who are trying to develop concentration. 'Rather', he says, 'it seems to apply to high-level tantric meditative practices, where a completely relaxed state of mind is a necessary condition of meditation'.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary then provides a summary:

- Of the nine stages to calm abiding, the first two levels of concentration specifically relate to developing and maintaining mindfulness in general, along with the first two of the six powers, and the first of the four mental engagements, which is forcible engagement.
- Maintaining mindfulness with new mindfulness, relates to the middle five mental concentrations, the third and fourth powers, and a part of the fifth power, and the second mental engagement, interrupted engagement.
- Maintaining mindfulness with old mindfulness, relates specifically to the eighth mental concentration, part of the fifth power, and uninterrupted mental engagement.
- Maintaining mindfulness with the appropriate measure, relates to the ninth concentration, with the sixth power and the fourth mental engagement, spontaneous engagement.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary concludes by saying that his presentation is in accordance with the instructions specified in the auto-commentary, as well as other texts such as Maitreya's *Ornament of Mahayana Discourses*.

We can conclude the session on the text here.

As the next session is a discussion session, it would be good for you to go over these points, and try to really understand the presentation of how to develop calm abiding.

In Mahamudra, the specific object presented for developing calm abiding is the mind itself. However that does not mean that the development of calm abiding only occurs when the mind is used as the object of concentration. Other objects can be used to develop concentration, and thus achieve calm abiding. The main thing is that we try to put some effort into gaining a good understanding of the technique.

The pre-requisite for any practice is a gaining a good understanding of the technique. Based on that understanding one can then engage in the practice. Even if one can't actually develop calm abiding in this life, then since we accept future lives, we will be at the very least preparing ourselves for developing calm abiding in our future life. Putting some time and energy into learning these techniques now will definitely place the positive imprints on our mind to develop calm abiding when the conditions are right in the future. The effort we put forth

now will definitely not go to waste, as it will be much easier for us to develop calm abiding in future lives.

As mentioned earlier in the Mahamudra text, the object used as a focus for concentration to develop calm abiding is the mind itself. I have of course explained many times before that in the lam rim the main object that is emphasised is the image of the Buddha Shakyamuni, while in the *Abhidharmakosha* the main object of focus for developing calm abiding is one's breath. Thus there are different objects that can be used.

The significance of using the image of Buddha Shakyamuni is that it will help us to purify our mind and receive blessings. Then due to our familiarity with focusing on an image of the Buddha, we will also be able to recall the image of the Buddha very easily at the time of death. The long-term benefit is that as one needs to practise tantra to achieve enlightenment, familiarising oneself with the image of the Buddha will assist tantric practices, so as to attain the realisations needed to achieve enlightenment.

In your discussion session, I encourage you to engage in discussion with a good intention, and really try to learn and share with each other. With that good intention the discussion will be much more meaningful. I also wish to emphasise the great benefit and importance of meditating regularly. Spending some time meditating regularly will definitely bring the benefit of soothing and calming the mind. That will make the mind a bit more joyful and happy, as well as developing a kinder mind.

A joyful, happy and kind mind is really the best state of mind that one can be in. Putting some effort into meditation helps to develop a mindfulness that assists in the maintenance of that kind mind, as well as maintaining one's Dharma practice.

Spending time and energy with external companions doesn't really seem to help us maintain a kind mind, or a mind that is encouraged in the practice of Dharma. In fact external friends can be more of a hindrance than a help.

I can share with you the fact that I feel quite joyful and happy on a regular basis. When I first noticed my feeling of happiness and joy, I was quite cautious and started to question why I was feeling happy. I thought that if it was because of external distractions then it wasn't a good sign that I was feeling happy. But when I checked the causes of that feeling of happiness and joy, I realised that it had nothing to do with the external conditions. In fact I felt happy and joyful even when external conditions were not so favourable. When I confirmed that, I began to rejoice and started to really appreciate that sense of joy and happiness within myself.

If you pay attention to what I am saying, and try to understand the point I am making, there is a great instruction to be found there.

What is to be understood here is that when feelings of happiness and joy come from external factors, then one should be a bit wary, because external factors can change at any time, and one can really become down and feel very depressed when they do.

Some people complain 'I was very happy and joyful when I went on a holiday with a friend. But when I came

back home I felt really down and depressed. Why is that so? I can only answer, 'You should be able to know what causes your distress'. That earlier joyfulness is because one may have been totally dependent on the other person. Then when they leave one feels empty and very down.

When the external factors that serve as a condition for a feeling of happiness are no longer there, it is very helpful if one has the inner conditions to feel joyful and happy. However if one lacks the internal conditions and loses the favourable external conditions as well, then it is like a double loss. A lack of external favourable conditions and internal favourable conditions results in feeling depressed and down. With appropriate inner conditions the feelings of joy and happiness are much more firmly established.

Meditation is the method for developing the inner conditions of feeling joyful and happy. Not only does it develop those positive feelings, but it is also a method for maintaining a kind mind. That is how meditation benefits us. If one lacks a sense of true joy and happiness within, then that is because no attempt has been made to transform and subdue one's mind. So it is worthwhile putting in some effort to try and transform one's mind by subduing it.

I regularly emphasise to all age groups that it is important to try to really maintain both elements of well-being. Of course some external conditions are necessary for survival, and to maintain stability in life. Neglecting the development of the internal condition of happiness and joy, while working so hard to acquire wealth and position, is only focussing on temporary stability and security in this life. What I'm emphasising is the importance of not forgetting future lifetimes. Even though it may be difficult to make a full time effort to acquire the causes for happiness in our future life, at a practical level it is worth maintaining some awareness of the well-being of our future life, and aim towards having a better rebirth. That will bring about good results even in this life, in particular it will secure stability in old age.

So trying to develop both inner and outer conditions really helps to maintain our well-being; otherwise there will be an empty feeling or a sense of loss. It is good to fill the empty gap and attain a sense of well-being.

It seems that those who spend all their time and energy developing external conditions reach a point where everything suddenly seems very meaningless. One has spent all that time and energy pursuing external goals, but to what end? Then a sense of a distress can arise. People who are not even Buddhists have told me of that sense of meaninglessness, even with the best external conditions. One very successful, well-to-do businessman said, 'I have a good business and everything is fine, but somehow I feel really empty inside. I don't feel any sense of joy. I have acquired quite a bit of wealth, however still have to go to work, which requires effort and energy. It tires me out and is very wearing. So I wonder what purpose my wealth and money has served, as I am still a slave to my work'.

On one occasion, I talked to a group in the north of the state and met a man who came from Wagga. He had

good health and lots of money, but preferred to get away from his work environment, business meetings, telephones etc, so he said that he would go into the bush. He said that he would walk for two hours to get away from everything.

These laments from even well-to-do people are the result of the fault of not having practiced meditation, and thus not having developed the inner conditions to be happy and joyful. What I'm emphasising here is that while we need external resources for ourselves, we also need to give an equal amount of time and energy to developing our inner resources.

When I go around different areas, of course language is a barrier, but it seems that many people just come up to me. I seem to have some sort of karma to just attract people who want to have a chat with me, and share their life experiences. I was at a restaurant in a nice hotel near the water in Geelong, and one man came up and spoke to me three times. Three times he came up! He said I'm not religious but if I were to choose then it would be Buddhism'.

What I wish to emphasise is the importance of really sharing whatever knowledge you have acquired from your studies in the past with the newer people on the discussion night. There is no danger of losing your knowledge if you share it, in fact your knowledge can only increase. It is really important that we are not miserly with whatever understanding we have. There are some who may feel that they don't want to speak too much. But it is actually good to open up and share your understanding and knowledge with others.

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Edited Version*

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